



Contributions of Baobab Tree (*Adansonia digitata*) in Hausa Cuisine and Folklore in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

*Studies of culture especially by anthropologists and sociologists tend to concentrate on particular forms of culture, which provide detailed analysis of the contents of cultural artifacts, such as indigenous trees with their cultural and economic roles. This research work therefore, investigates the impacts of Baobab tree (English name), in the Hausa dish and folklore. The research focused only on the same philosophical analysis of the oral traditions by Hausa folklorists. The research chooses Baobab tree namely: **kuka** (Hausa language), commonly called Baobab tree because of the fact that Hausa use it as sacred tree and as sources of daily food. The research is limited to the type of soup called 'miyar kuka' (Hausa language) or Baobab leaves' soup (English), and also traces the economic and other cultural benefits of Baobab tree such as medicinal benefits. The research adopts grounded theory approach in analysing the collected data. This research revealed the role of Baobab tree in promoting cultural integration and development.*

Key words: Baobab, *Adansonia digitata*, Tree, Hausa, Cuisine Folklore,

1.0 Introductions

Culture could be defined as the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors and artifact that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning (Finnegan, 2005). Belief system falls within the branch of tradition belonging to a group of people's culture, which makes the people to have a sense of curiosity to

the state of uncertainty. Hence, belief system then is undeniably an important aspect of a people's cultural resource which is passed down from generation to generation thus contributing to the continuity of culture. However, in the most non literate societies in the past, and even today, superstition play an important role as instrument of self- control by the morals they teach like how to avoid things

of uncertainty in order to restore peace and order to the society. Folk belief is amongst the common genres of oral tradition that still play an important part in the regularization of the lives of many people in the world (Tremearne, 1970). No doubt that, the position of folk belief in the 21th century still plays a significant role in all aspect of human endeavor. In another words, folk belief cannot be overcome by logic. In many cases it is a survival from those primitive religions in which man worshipped the wild elements in the pious hope that they might help him in his struggle for survival. However, Hausa indigenous trees have significance role to play in the life of *Hausawa* (people of the Hausa tribe) either directly or indirectly. The research chooses only one indigenous tree, namely: *kuka* (Baaba), the reason of choosing Baobab tree perhaps is due to the fact that Hausa use it as sacred tree as

Research Question

- i. to what extent do Northern indigenous Baobab tree Baobab be used as a staple by Hausa tribe?
- ii. do Northern indigenous Baobab tree boost the economy of the Hausas (Hausa People), community and Country at large?

well as sources of daily food. In addition to that, there are a lot of proverbs attached to Baobab which teaches moral lesson such as discipline, hospitality, kindness, generosity and charity. The paper adopts Bunza (2006) model of analysis in analyzing material and non-material culture. Also, the research focuses on the relationship of the Baobab with man in his physical environment. In the same vein, the research traces the economic benefit of Baobab tree to the development of the country as well as its cultural benefits of it on the perspective of modern medicine and Islamic medicine. Conversely, to support this oral belief with evidence from Hausa tribe wise saying: Hausa indigenous trees have multi-purpose use and every part of the plants is reported to be useful (Ibrahim, 2023). In Northern Nigeria, Baobab leaf is a staple food that Hausawa used to make “miyan kuka” soup (FAO, 2011).

Objective(s) of the Study

The primary aim of this research is to assess the usage of the Baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*) as cuisines and in other cultural practices within Hausa states. This study is tailored around achieving the following objectives

- i. to identify the economic significance of Northern indigenous Baobab tree
- ii. profile the impact of Baobab tree as staple and medicinal tree

Literature Review

Baobab Tree is popularly called Mother of the Sahel (*Jagabar Itatuwa a Yankin Sahel*)(Hausa language). *Adansonia digitata* (kuka) is a tree belonging to the Malvaceae family. It is one of the eight species of Baobab (*Adansonia*) and the only one native to main land Africa (FAO, 2011). However, recently the European Commission authorized the import of Baobab fruit pulp as a novel food (FAO, 2011) and it was approved in by the food and drug administration as a food ingredient in the United States of America. Hence, Baobab tree has multi-purpose uses and every part of the plant is reported to be useful (Ibrahim, 2020). Tukur and Murtala, (2013) in their paper titled “An Assessment of Multi-purpose Use of *Adansonia digitata* (Baobab Tree) for Sustainable Development in the Semi-urban Fringes of Dutsinma Katsina State”. They have concentrated only on the multi-purpose of Baobab tree while this research strictly limited it horizon on the application of Baobab powder as ingredients for making varieties of soup. More so, Isah, (2025) said in Northern Nigeria, Baobab leaf is a staple that people from the tribe of Hausa and others that adopt their culture used it in the preparation of *miyar kuka soup*. In the same regards, Baobab tree happened to be an important plant in Sudan-Saharan region of Africa; the tree has; so marv

uses among rural dwellers. Because of its' ample uses it attract people's attention to undertake researches on it, as a result, many uses were discovered and more potential uses were on the pipeline. This is in addition to locally or traditionally known uses such as use in preparation of soup, medicinal, animal fodder etc. However, the seeds are used as a thickening agent in soups, but they can be fermented and used as a flavoring agent, or roasted and eaten as snacks. Gani, (2025) has listed the types of ingredients that could match in the preparation of Baobab soup but he limited his work on beans, dry fish, vegetable and the pure powder without mixing it with any ingredient like protein such as meat, fish, and beans. Bulama, (2023:71) observes Bado proverbs that deal with cuisine as their cultural heritage. Reason for this particular work been cited due to the fact that all are Chadic languages they belong to Afroasiatic culture.

Methodology

. The data for this research was collected from 90 key informants from nine states of Northern Nigeria (Table 1), using individual interviews and focus group discussions with participants who possessed deep-rooted knowledge of local traditions and practices. The data was collected using interviews with the help of semi-structured questionnaires, which allowed for

flexibility in exploring respondents' perspectives, while ensuring that key themes related to the research aim were addressed

Population and Sample

The target population group for the interview included elderly men and women, herbalist, and traditionalist, within Northern Nigeria. To identify and reach these key informants, the snowball sampling technique was employed. This method was particularly useful in locating knowledgeable individuals, as initial participants were able to refer the interviewer to other potential respondents who had extensive knowledge and experience.

The interview focused on the uses of the Baobab tree, specifically its domestic and

Focus group discussions further enrich the data by encouraging interactive dialogue and the sharing of collective memories and practices among participants.

cultural applications within the community. Key informants provided insights into how different parts of the Baobab tree are traditionally used in daily life and in cultural practices.

In selection of the sample state. The study areas (Hausa States) were stratified into these strata namely southern states, central states and northern states (Table 1). The grouping the state a long geographical gradient is to account for geographical difference in the distribution of Baobab trees.

Table 1: Sample of the study areas

Status	States	Sample State	Number of Respondents
Southern	Kaduna Niger Bauchi	Kaduna	30
Central	Kano Zamfara Kebbi	Kano	30
Northern	Katsina Sokoto Jigawa	Katsina	30

3.2 Theory Structural/Ra'in Tsarintaka (Hausa language)

This paper chooses structural theory to tailor the analysis. However, structural theory particularly as developed in anthropology by Claude Levi-Strauss, provides a framework for

analyzing culture by examining underlying structures and systems of meaning. Therefore, one of the reasons of chosen this theory is to described how Hausa prepared *Miyar Kuka* by using different ingredients such as: flesh, dry fish, roasted fish, goat meat, beans, beef, chicks and Baobab leaf etc

Al'adar miya', a tsarin yadda take, shi ne, akwai wasu tsari na sassan abubuwan da ke tayar da ita, wadanda suka hada da ruwa da gishiri da daddawa da manja ko na gyada (ko duka) da garin kuka da sauran makamantansu.

Translated as

The culture of soup, the soup, has structured and that structure has some parts which form it; such as water, salt, locust beans, palm oil or groundnut oil (or all), Baobab powder etc.

Therefore, these ingredients come together to create a typical Hausa dish, representative of one of West Africa's recognized cuisines, particularly in Northern Nigeria.

This particular soup has no any protein to be added to it. In a typical Hausa community, they used to prepare such types of soup, but it depends on the economy of the household. Based on the clients' views, such types of soup

Ingredients

- i. Baobab
- ii. Salt
- iii. Locust beans
- iv. Water
- v. Oil

b. Baobab Soup with Beans

This is the least expected protein ingredient of the soup. However, 'miyar kuka da wake' as the name implies is the generic but it has types as we can see from the categorization. Thus, this soup showcased

A. Soup (miya)

Types of Soup Made from Kuka (*Adansonia digitata*)

- a. Baobab Soup Protein-Free (*Kada Kwarya*) ko *Miyar Talakawa* (Destitute)

are associated with higher degree of poverty or impoverished as the case may be. However, the structure of this particular soup defines the status, class and the financial implications

Kitchen Equipment

- i. Pot
- ii. Pestle
- iii. Mortar
- iv. Swizzle Stick
- v. Hausa traditional tray
- vi. Net
- vii. Traditional Oven

the social hierarchy, economic disparities, and traditional household structures within the Hausa community. For instance, such types of soup belong to household without rich or wealthy but stingy or polygamous house where they may request high quantity of beans and is very costly

Ingredients

- i. Baobab powder
- ii. Beans
- iii. Salt
- iv. Locust beans
- v. Water
- vi. Oil- groundnut, palm oil and olive
- vii. Maggi is optional and it was introduced into Hausaland by Europeans

c. Baobab Soup with Protein -*Miyar Mawadata* (Wealthy)

As the name implies, Baobab soup with protein belongs to the special group or social class. In the Hausa community people with power of economy prepare this particular soup with fully ingredients and

.Ingredients

- i. Baobab powder
- ii. Beans
- iii. Salt
- iv. Locust beans
- v. Water
- vi. Oil- groundnut, palm oil and olive
- vii. Goat meat, fish, chicken and guinea fowl

highest protein (meat, fish, chickens, guinea fowl etc). Equally, this classic soup is for elitism as the saying goes *miyar attajirai* means soup for richest people. Therefore, this soup is a marker of social identity and status in Hausa community or privileged elite

Maggi is optional and it was introduced into Hausaland by Europeans

B. Food

Dan wake (dumplings)

Dan Wake: A traditional Hausa cuisine. There is no such thing as Dan Wake without Baobab powder. As the name implies, Baobab powder is essential for Dan Wake to retain its identity. While other ingredients- such as flour, guinea corn, millet, potash, and pepper – can vary

based on preference, Baobab powder remains the core component.

Dan Wake is a beloved and popular dish among the Hausa people. Its origin is deeply rooted in Hausa culture, so much so that there is no clear historical record of when it began. It is simply known to have existed from time immemorial

as one of the traditional dishes of the Hausa community. There are several ways to enjoy Dan Wake, depending on personal taste. It can serve with spicy pepper sauce (yajin kuli-kuli) groundnut oil, palm oil, soup or even olive oil.

C. Beverage (abinci da abubuwan sha)

Madarar kuka

Kwalba da nono

Kunun zafi

Kunun sanyi ko zaki

Kankarar kuka

Today, Dan Wake has gained international recognition as one of Africa's most celebrated and culturally significant cuisines.

Baobab milk

Bottle milk

Hot beverage

Cool beverage

Ice products

All these beverages are produced with Baobab fruits but what distinguishes each is the method of applications of the chemical composition. In addition, all these beverages have received

recognition as a typical Hausa cuisine and now are international and national beverages in accordance with African dish inventory

D. Raw Materials

Igiya

Kwale-kwale/Jirgin Ruwa

The Baobab tree has long been valued for its practical uses in traditional communities. Farmers traditionally crafted strong and durable rope from the bark of the Baobab tree. This observed that canoes made from Baobab wood are remarkably sturdy. These canoes can last for a long time and generally remain undamaged unless involved in an accident. This highlights the Baobab tree's importance as a natural resource in rural livelihoods.

Rope

Canoe

rope was known for its high quality and ability to resist wear and tear over many seasons. In addition to rope-making, the Baobab tree is also used in boat construction. Fishermen have Okam and Lawal (2014) elaborate further that folk is broadly categorized into cultural forms embracing all kinds of legends, riddles, jokes, proverbs, games, charms, omens, spells, devil possession and rituals, especially those of pre-literate societies or social classes. Ibrahim, (1982) said:

Folklore

"...iskoki suna warwatse ko'ina cikin duniya, amma sun fi zama a gidajen tururuwa da cikin suri da kan tsamiya da kuma kogon kuka..."

Translated as:

“...spirits are spread everywhere in the world but predominantly domiciled at black ants pit, ants’ hill, tamarind tree and cave of Baobab tree...”

Therefore, the source of each Hausa traditional medicine was at the hands of sorcerers, herbalists and those practicing devil possessions. These traditionalists give medicine from the trees fragment; such as leaf, barks, fruits, roots, mistletoe, nectars, etc to cure different illness/diseases. These people do not only give medicine but also perform rituals including testifying the integrity of a bride during her matrimonial celebration. To exemplify rituals, the paper presents *tsafin Bagiro*.

Magic/Bagiro

This means fetishism. In Hausa culture, it is used to showcase the integrity test of the bride

Witch/Maita

“To shi maye a gun mayu Hausawa, kurwa yake kamawa ya kaita wani wuri kamar kogon bishiyar kuka ya boye ta, in bai dawo da ita ba sai wanda ya kama ya mutu”

Hence, a part from keeping soul kurwa in the Baobab carve by witches so also spiritually Baobab tree has role to play especially for being spirits and other devils’ home. A very big Baobab tree usually has a cave within it, that cave is believed to be the hiding place for snakes, hyenas, ants

whether she is virgin or vis-à-vis. Bagiro fetishism is organized under a sacred tree tamarind or Baobab during wedding ceremonies of maguzawa of Hausa state. The organizers used to ask a bride whether she had ever experience sex during her **tsarance** (to sleep with your girlfriend out of wedlock) if she says no, then they will proceed with the arrangement of the Bagiro fetishism. The items they may request are: cock, goat and calabash of wine to keep them beneath the sacred tamarind or Baobab up to the sunset, if the bride proved innocent, they will come and see the cock, the goat had died and the wine have been drunk. This is to prove the bride has taken its virginity to her husband. In the alternation to this decency, the bride has lost its virginity the spirit will instantly soak her blood and die.

4.3 Festival/Buki Shan Kabewa

This is the one of the festivals of its kinds that Hausa used to perform within the year and its focus was to protect people from the disease the year will come with and predict the forthcoming year. The magicians invite other magicians from far and nearby for the festivity. According to Ibrahim, (1982:256)

“...wani lokaci kuma sukan hau kan kuka idan akwai bishiyar a kusa da wuri. Daga kan wannan turmin ko bishiyar kukar ne xan borin zai wo tsalle ya faxi da gindi a kan kabewar...” (Ibrahim, 1982: 256)

Translated as:

“...sometime, they climbed up a nearby Baobab tree or used mortar. From the mortar or Baobab tree the spirit possessed would drop down on the pumpkin” using his buttock.

Therefore, when performing such kind of festival, organizers have to look for a place where a very big Baobab tree is located. But in Niger Republic, such display of spirit possession is performed in a place where ginger

4.4 Superstition/Camfi

Ibrahim, (2020) defines superstition as a belief in something that is irrational, non-physical and does not follow the rule of science. Therefore, based on the field survey, the paper identifies the following superstitions that are related to tamarind, Baobab and ginger bread. These are:

Duk wanda ya kwana a gindin iccen kuka har gari ya waye zai haukace

Sleeping beneath the Baobab tree from sunset to sunrise might causes madness

i. The Beginning: Sleeping beneath the Baobab tree /*Kwana a gindin iccen kuka*

bread are more in numbers. In addition to this, Ibrahim, et al, (2007: 89) observes that ‘places where spirits are located include: anthills, tamarind, Baobab and ginger bread/doum etc

ii. Reward: sleeping to the sunrise might cause madness/ *Har gari ya waye zai haukace*

iii. Protection: Do not sleep/ *Ka da a kwana*

Special Power for Casting Spells/Qohi

In the traditional Hausa society, there are some indigenous trees with the special magical power i.e. tamarind, Baobab and doum. Thus, Hausa culture has the belief on the Baobab tree as a den of spirits. Similarly, it is believed also that Baobab tree has a special power for casting spells. As Bunza (2006:216) cited:

Ba a sare ta, ko a xebi xiyanta gabanin su nuna, a kwashe lafiya. Da ita, da kuka, da xorawa, Hausawa sun ce, idan aka jefe su nan take suke rama jifa.

Translated as:

No one cuts down Baobab tree or removes its fruits before it ripens and remains at peace. It is said that when one throw at Baobab and locust-bean, they throw back.

Proverb /Karin Magana

Proverb is a warehouse for cultural heritage of a people in the sense that proverbs contain various lexical items representing materials and non-materials culture. For example, domestic tools are employed to relate with trees in the formation of proverbs. These include: axe, sickle, mortar etc “*Gatarin da ya sari gawo da bagaruwa ba zai bar kalgo ba*”. **The axe that cuts the winter and Egyptian mimosa thorns will not secure the camel’s foot.** Bulama, (2023), opines those proverbs enshrine much of the cultural heritage of a people, their traditions, their history, their wisdom, their ethics and folk belief.

Baobab Tree

Dan kuka mai jawo uwarsa jifa

It is the Boobab fruit that attracts stoning against its mother

Literally means “child of Baobab” and actually refers to its fruits. People usually stone the fruits with the aim of bringing the fruits down and sucking them. However, in most cases, the missiles aimed at the fruits would miss the mark and hit the boughs or trunk of the Baobab. In real situations also, children often commit offences of which the repercussions are

suffered by their parents. For example, if a person is seen at a police station and is asked why he/she is there, he/she would reply with the proverb to indicate that one of his/her children is responsible for being there.

Ka bar ganin girman kuka, bagaruwa ce babba

Stop seeing the large shape of the Boobab; the Egyptian mimosa is older.

This is the rhetorical proverb that came in statement. The lesson derived in this proverb showcased that all the trees are indigenous to Africa. These ancient trees Hausas tribes have studied their nature and constructed a nice metaphor that deals either with history, love, culture and economy. Application of this proverb in daily conversation i.e, if one like to formally disdain someone who has a huge shape thinking he is senior, while the tiny is must older then such metaphor is more preferable. In other words, one may use the metaphor to describe the history of friendship or loyalty.

The Selected Song, Eulogy and Metaphor Deal with Baobab Tree/Waqa da kirari da Adon Harshe

I selected only one famous singer Isah Ayagi born and grew in Kano.

“...kana cikin sharbinka
Sai ka yi gamo da ‘ya’yan kuka...”

Translated as:
You are in your prime
Then you met some bad eggs

In this song, the artist uses Baobab fruits as a metaphor to describe people with bad habits. In life, when you are thriving- perhaps due to success in business, a government position, or political office, you often attract people from different backgrounds who intrude into your affairs because they see something to gain from you. However, when your situation changes, these same people are quick to abandon you and even mock with hurtful slogans.

Eulogy/Kirari

Birnin Kuka (City of Baobab Tree)

In Katsina state, a village was named Birnin Kuka (City of the Baobab Tree), highlighting the prevalence of the Baobab tree in the area. In the case of Kano, Mansur gave an apt example of Kukar Bulukiya. It is also evident that the Baobab tree is often associated with myths and spirits in the oral traditions of Hausawa.

Metaphor/ Adon Harshe

Mace mai jikin kuka kiwon Allah

A woman with a frame of Baobab is feed by Allah

This is a metaphor portrays a lady with beautiful, soft skin that attracts many suitors, likening her to the Baobab tree. The Baobab is typically smooth, watery and large in size. Therefore, metaphor here used to describe a tall and well-built woman. Hence, beyond her physical appearance, the metaphor also highlights her humble background. Which showcased that she is the daughter of an impoverished man. Thus, the metaphor functions not only as a commentary on physical beauty but also as a critique of the contrast between outward appearance and underlying social realities.

Herbalist

An herbalist is someone who studies and uses plants, herbs and botanicals for medicinal, therapeutic, or spiritual purposes as could be seen in the typical Hausa community where they named them: magori, yar mai ganye, sarkin mayu and malamin tsibbu. Therefore, these herbalists are trained and professionals and all of them focus on traditional or folk practices. Below are some of the functions of Baobab tree on human beings:

Ganyen Kuka (Baobab Leaves)

Baobab leaf could be processed into powder and serve in various methods. When Baobab powder has been used in soups or stews it increases volume of sperm. But when it uses in tea it serves as booster. However, Baobab

powder reduces the strength of family planning pills. To support this argument, this is the reason in Hausaland and parts of Niger Republic these contraceptives are not working very well, due to the fact that, Baobab is staple food to Hausas. In addition, Baobab powder cures such diseases like peptic ulcers: gastric ulcer, duodenal ulcer, esophageal ulcer.

Ruwan Cikin Kuka (Water in the trunk)

Baobab tree has water in the trunk. This type of water is medicinal. The volume of water depends on the size of the tree. A large mature tree stores up to 100,000 litres while small store up to 5000 litres. In Hausa traditional medicine, water extracted from the trunk of mature Baobab tree is believed to have healing properties, particularly for liver issues, HIV/AIDs and erectile dysfunction. This water is administered using specific traditional procedures.

‘Ya’yan Kuka (Fruits Pulp)

In Hausa culture, Baobab fruits pulp is believed to: cures typhoid fever, filter or cleanse the blood and increase physical strength or vigour. Therefore, it serves as stimulant and energizer of the body when the fruits are roasted, powder, is used in many Sahelian cultures.

Sassake (Bark)

Baobab bark serves as medicine to sickle cell anaemia when the bark has been boiled and

drink as was described. Bark reduces the inflammation especially to those pregnant women and also help them to have ease delivery.

Conclusion

No doubt today the consumption of Baobab powder has gained widespread acceptance among the Hausa people, where it is incorporated as a regular component of daily meals. It is particularly valued for its culinary versatility as it can be prepared either with or without protein, without diminishing its palatability. This adaptability contributes to its sustained consumption, as it does not lead to dietary fatigue or reduced appetite, even when consumed frequently. Baobab powder is thus regarded not only as a source of nourishment but also as a significant dietary, staple within Hausa communities. In addition to its nutritional value, Baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*) and its various parts are utilized in traditional medicine, with efficacy often linked to adherence to specific preparation methods, as supported by ethno-botanical analyses. Moreover, the Baobab tree occupies a prominent place in Hausa oral tradition and folklore, symbolizing cultural identity and continuity, as evidenced in oral narratives, proverbs, and songs

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